

# REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Washington Headquarters Service, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC 20503.

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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 29-04-2010		2. REPORT TYPE Master of Military Studies Research Paper		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) September 2009 - April 2010	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE SOVIET COUNTERINSURGENCY OPERATIONS IN AFGHANISTAN (1979-1988)				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER N/A	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER N/A	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER N/A	
6. AUTHOR(S) Major Brian Hawkins, USMC				5d. PROJECT NUMBER N/A	
				5e. TASK NUMBER N/A	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER N/A	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) USMC Command and Staff College Marine Corps University 2076 South Street Quantico, VA 22134-5068				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER N/A	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) N/A	
				11. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER N/A	
12. DISTRIBUTION AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES N/A					
14. ABSTRACT Hamstrung by their strict, Marxist-Leninist doctrine, the Soviet Union chose to fight the Afghan mujahidin in an overwhelmingly conventional style, with its later attempts to apply a form of counterinsurgency strategy consumed by a virtually unrestrained reliance upon the military element of its national power. Despite significant tactical improvements, the Soviet Union failed to demonstrate versatility and agility in their application of the instruments of national power. Their failure occurred despite the centralized "command and control" nature of the Soviet government, which should have been ideally suited for the implementation, and integration, of political, economic and security policies in the DRA. This study of the Soviet experience in Afghanistan offers historical context for participants in the current U.S./NATO mission, but also, specifically, helps these operators understand how another modern superpower recently chose to fight an insurgency in that country, with tragic results.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Soviet Union; Afghanistan; mujahidin; counterinsurgency; Soviet-Afghan War					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 35	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Marine Corps University / Command and Staff College
a. REPORT Unclass	b. ABSTRACT Unclass	c. THIS PAGE Unclass			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code) (703) 784-3330 (Admin Office)

United States Marine Corps  
Command and Staff College  
Marine Corps University  
2076 South Street  
Marine Corps Combat Development Command  
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**TITLE:**

SOVIET COUNTERINSURGENCY OPERATIONS IN AFGHANISTAN (1979-1988)

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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## **Executive Summary**

**Title:** Soviet Counterinsurgency Operations in Afghanistan (1979-1988)

**Author:** Major Brian C. Hawkins, United States Marine Corps

**Thesis:** Hamstrung by their strict, Marxist-Leninist doctrine, the Soviet Union chose to fight the Afghan *mujahidin* in an overwhelmingly conventional style, with its later attempts to apply a form of counterinsurgency strategy consumed by a virtually unrestrained reliance upon the military element of its national power.

**Discussion:** This paper will furnish the reader with an orientation to classical and modern counterinsurgency theory, placing the Soviet approach within this cosmology. An examination of Soviet practices will highlight their tactical military transformation during this crucial period, but also will reveal their surprising attempts to influence economic, political and cultural change in the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA). This analysis will show how Soviet inability to articulate a coherent strategy or combine these elements toward a common vision ultimately yielded inadequate progress. A case study of Operation *Panjshir* VII demonstrates the tactical, air-ground improvisation Soviet forces refined during the conflict, but also highlights the absence of strategic focus.

**Conclusion:** Despite significant tactical improvements, the Soviet Union failed to demonstrate versatility and agility in their application of the instruments of national power. Their failure occurred despite the centralized “command and control” nature of the Soviet government, which should have been ideally suited for the implementation, and integration, of political, economic and security policies in the DRA. This study of the Soviet experience in Afghanistan offers historical context for participants in the current U.S./NATO mission, but also, specifically, helps these operators understand how another modern superpower recently chose to fight an insurgency in that country, with tragic results.

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## **Preface**

This paper addresses the Soviet Union's approach to counterinsurgency during the Soviet-Afghanistan War (1979-1988). I chose this topic because I wanted to understand the current U.S./NATO mission in Afghanistan through the perspective of the insurgents of Afghanistan. This required that I learn about that nation's recent history. I would like to acknowledge the following individuals for their expert advice, resourcefulness and incredible guidance: Dr. Douglas Streusand, Dr. Mark Jacobsen, and Ms. Rachel Kingcade.

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Despite a history of successful irregular operations against Muslim guerilla organizations, the Red Army leadership's rigid adherence to Marxist-Leninist ideology blinded the Soviet Union to the reality of the *mujahidin* resistance in Afghanistan and inhibited implementation of effective counterinsurgency practices. Important tactical innovations, unsupported by adequate political, social and economic reforms, ultimately failed to garner victory. Commenting on Soviet adaptation in the conflict, scholars disagree over whether the Red Army ever actually developed a true counterinsurgency strategy. This study will seek to define the Soviet counterinsurgency approach during the period of the conflict and evaluate its strengths and weaknesses. First, the study will seek to place the Soviet approach within the context of classical and modern counterinsurgency theory. Next, it will assess changes in Soviet counterinsurgency methods over time. Third, a case study, featuring one of the nine operations against Ahmad Shah Massoud in the Panjshir Valley, north of Kabul (Operation *Panjshir VII*, April 1984), will illustrate the Red Army's evolving counterinsurgency approach, and its misplaced trust in military solutions. Finally, the study will conclude with lessons learned for the current, U.S./NATO mission.

In order to diagnose the character of the Soviet's counterinsurgency strategy precisely, a brief review of counterinsurgency theory is appropriate. In general, three counterinsurgency approaches exist. The first two, "classical" approaches, the "enemy-centric" and "population-centric" models, express contrary warfighting strategies, while a modern variation, or "hybrid" approach, amalgamates the other two. The enemy-centric model urges the counterinsurgent to focus on finding, engaging and destroying the enemy. After the destruction of the enemy force, political, social and economic development occurs naturally. Examples of this model include Russia, Britain and France during the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Adherents to the enemy-



centric approach tend to favor more kinetic operations, and are less concerned with winning “heart and minds.” While this approach still finds its advocates even today, the severe means required for execution have undermined its popularity. As one of the chief proponents of an enemy-centric strategy, C. E. Callwell stated simply in 1896: “The enemy must not only be beaten. He must be beaten thoroughly.”<sup>1</sup> In this view, terrain means virtually nothing, but “body counts” matter. This approach plays to the advantages of the superior power: they prevail through firepower, troop numbers and discipline. Through decisiveness and violent action, uncommitted audiences will sway to the side of the superior power. Enemy casualties should be maximized and if the enemy refuses to fight, target the economic lifelines of the society. Resistance must be crushed quickly, since long deployments cause problems in supply and troop welfare for the counterinsurgent force. The Russians knew this strategy well, as Callwell notes in this quote from Russian General Mikhail Skobelev in the mid-1800s: “Do not forget that in Asia he is...master who seizes the people pitilessly by the throat and imposes upon their imagination.”<sup>2</sup>

Another classical counterinsurgency approach, the population-centric model, focuses upon winning the support of the population as a first priority by concentrating upon their physical security, while simultaneously improving their social and economic opportunities. In this way, the insurgents become irrelevant, and the remnants of their force can be easily destroyed. David Galula and Roger Trinquier were mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century proponents who critiqued the enemy-centric approach by noting that although the counterinsurgent usually has more troops and firepower, the insurgent can control the time and place of engagements through better knowledge of the environment. Conversely, the population is fixed and does not require pursuit through unfamiliar terrain. A more defensive focus is appropriate for the counterinsurgent because the

insurgent is more mobile and aware. This approach has been widely adopted in doctrine in the contemporary American military, through the influence of General David Petraeus and LtCol John Nagl. The theoretical and historical underpinnings of this model were based on the work of French officers, Hubert Lyautey and Joseph Gallieni, who said that excessive force and collateral damage generally worked at cross-purposes to the mission. Their teachings stress the importance of understanding the culture and conducting non-military tasks to gain the population's support. T.E. Lawrence suggests "unremitting" commitment to studying local populations.<sup>3</sup>

In truth, no counterinsurgency strategy can be regarded as exclusively enemy- or population-centric. Even imperial armies, most frequently associated with enemy-centric strategies, often pursued political ends, as demonstrated by Lyautey and Gallieni. This approach enabled the counterinsurgents to co-opt local populations by constructing religious, social and political governing structures that would be acceptable to local populations, thereby allowing stability. A modern counterinsurgency model, the hybrid approach, blends elements of both enemy- and population-centric models. This strategy demands solid situational awareness and an adaptive posture, and requires educated and flexible military forces and leadership. David Kilcullen, a proponent of this approach, identifies three essential pillars around which the counterinsurgency strategy resides: "political, economic and military" matters.<sup>4</sup> Overall, the hybrid model tends to offer the least "schoolhouse" solutions, since it offers only vague advice, dependent upon the situation at hand.

From this discussion of the three basic types of counterinsurgency, some overarching rules tend to take shape. First, all counterinsurgency approaches are hybrids, to varying degrees, as they eventually require some form of political, social or economic overtures. The degree to which the counterinsurgent succeeds depends upon achieving the appropriate combination of

these tools. Second, understanding the local culture and people allows the counterinsurgent to cultivate intelligence, eliminate active sanctuaries, adopt local solutions through junior leaders, conduct information campaigns to support the counterinsurgent effort, and develop appropriate governmental and economic structures. Finally, because the insurgency's power operates on so many different levels, the counterinsurgent must coordinate and integrate his military, political, social and economic initiatives.<sup>5</sup>

In order to place the Soviet approach in Afghanistan within this broader framework of counterinsurgency doctrine, one must explore Soviet expectations. Indeed, the Soviet Union had actual experience fighting Muslim insurgencies in their past, and might have done well to ferret out the clear lessons from their history. The Soviets had experienced unconventional war during their own Civil War (1918-1920), and during the *Basmachi* rebellion of the 1920s-30s.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately for the 40<sup>th</sup> Army, by the 1970s, the doctrinal focus and experience of Soviet military and political leaders largely came from large-scale conventional war. The Red Army leadership expected the Afghan intervention would follow the model illustrated in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968), requiring minimal actual combat by Soviet forces.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the invasion of a neighbor to support a fledgling communist regime appeared consistent with Soviet doctrine. Once he decided upon "Socialism in one state," Stalin had envisioned a "ring of brother states" around the Soviet periphery as a buffer against imperialist aggression, a view that would become reality after World War II with the evolution of the Warsaw Pact in Europe.<sup>8</sup> Afghanistan would presumably follow this model, as well. Finally, "Red Commanders" such as Mikhail Tukhachevsky, chief of the Red Army from 1925 to 1928, had long ago established the idea of spreading Revolution by the bayonet, and "starting revolutionary wars in far off lands."<sup>9</sup>

Classical Marxism, and its interpretation through the lens of Soviet military development since 1917, left little room for the concept of anti-Soviet counterinsurgency.<sup>10</sup> In their 2002 translation of The Russian General Staff's, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, editors Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress cite the "disturbing" degree to which Soviet intelligence felt compelled to explain events within the context of a Marxist-Leninist framework. "Consequently the Soviets never fully understood the *Mujahidin* opposition nor why many of their policies failed to work in Afghanistan."<sup>11</sup> Several factors impelled the Soviet Union to invade Afghanistan including a calculation of relatively low risk, an assumption that the actual fighting would be done by Afghans, a need to block what were perceived as its increasingly warm ties with the West, and a simple Russian desire for territorial expansion. Once the decision was made, opposing views were unlikely, especially within the military. With seeds of friction in Soviet military development tracing back to the Revolution, a split between the czarist, "military experts" and ideologically driven, "Red Commanders" still lingered. When the advice of the more conservative "military experts" differed from that of the Communist political leadership, the typical charge would be "Bonapartism," an accusation that would resonate even in the 1970s.<sup>12</sup>

Did this historical context allow for a feasible, Soviet strategy? Based upon the above assumptions and expectations, the Soviet leadership initially appears to have approached the Afghan invasion in a purely conventional manner. The nature and character of the budding Afghan resistance to foreign influence, much less invasion, should have prompted immediate transition from conventional warfare to a counterinsurgency approach. While the Afghan people never presented a direct, conventional threat, the Soviets badly misread Afghan tactics, prompting conventional responses. Indeed, the Soviet command misinterpreted the disparate

aspects of the insurgency, often referred to as a “mosaic” of ethnic, religious and nationalist motivations, as “banditry.”<sup>13</sup> Not only did the Soviets have to contend with a confusing, alien culture, but also the dramatic political cleavages within the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan itself made the situation even harder to read. This rapidly changing strategic environment prior to the Soviet invasion in December 1979 likely contributed to Soviet difficulty in understanding Afghanistan’s political and strategic context, and applying the correct political and military solutions.

Stepping into a hazy strategic situation, with flawed operational assumptions, the 40<sup>th</sup> Army was further constrained by the wider context of the Cold War. In the 1970s, Soviet military thought focused almost exclusively upon thermonuclear and large-scale conventional interstate war.<sup>14</sup> “[T]he strategy pursued by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan was in part a product of long-term ideology, culture, and interests, but more a product of improvisation.”<sup>15</sup> The implications on Soviet resource allocation were profound; the Soviet commitment in Afghanistan was to be an “economy of force” mission, with the focus of Red Army combat power to remain in the European theatre. The official name for the 40<sup>th</sup> Army was the “Limited Contingent of Soviet Forces in Afghanistan,” the bulk of which, seven motor rifle divisions, was composed entirely of local (i.e., Central Asian), reserve call-ups. From the start, Soviet leaders had concern over the loyalty of these troops, and their equipment, which was mostly useless.<sup>16</sup>

A brief description of *mujahidin* capabilities and motivations allows further understanding of the inapplicability of the Soviets’ conventional warfighting approach. The Afghan insurgency was motivated neither by nationalism nor by ideology. It defined itself in terms of its enemy, and that enemy was not so much Communism as Russia, and not only Russia alone but all foreigners. The Afghans accepted outside help but did so reluctantly and without affection for the donors.

One insurgent leader, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar noted that foreign support, especially from the United States, tainted the Islamic character of the fight, making it less noble.<sup>17</sup> Xenophobia and distrust of foreigners was a major motivation. The rallying cry was non-ideological, but rather defined by Islam. The Afghan "way," the social code that was encapsulated in Islam that Afghans felt was being attacked, prompted their determination to fight.<sup>18</sup> Even so, chronic infighting and distrust between mujahidin groups would limit their potential throughout the war. As one observer noted, the *mujahidin* were "too disunited to win the war, but they [were] too spread out to lose it."<sup>19</sup>

Soviet political strategy, military strategy and military objectives drove their approach. Along with their own political strategy, the Soviets needed to attend to the goals and vision of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA), the weak, communist government they ostensibly came to support and reinforce. The PDPA attempt to force revolutionary change upon a conservative, Afghan people, with such revolutionary ideas as land reform, women's rights, and ethnic egalitarianism, seemed too much, too fast, even according to some Soviet theorists.<sup>20</sup> As previously noted, the Soviet military strategy assumed, at least initially, that the insurgency was small and limited, and that the Soviet military role should be limited as well. As insurgency took root, the commitments for the Soviet Army increased, and a more realistic military strategy formed: undermine and divide insurgent groups (who are imperialist-supported "bandits") who threaten the DRA government. In *Counterinsurgency and the Global War on Terror: Military Culture and Irregular War*, Robert Cassidy, notes a "threefold strategy" on the Soviets' part: attrition and reprisals against insurgents and the supporting population; seal borders to preclude enemy supply routes; and penetration of the resistance movement.<sup>21</sup> The evolved military objectives, taking into account a

more muscular Soviet role, developed from the initial concept of simply defeating the *mujahidin* to, instead, "intimidat[ing] and terroriz[ing] the population into abandoning areas of intense resistance and withdrawing support for the guerillas."<sup>22</sup> As Cassidy properly notes, the Soviet approach became a "war of annihilation."<sup>23</sup>

Aside from the obvious disconnect between those ends, further problems begin to unfurl in an analysis of the ways the Red Army actually conducted operations. Brutal tactics have been blamed for the lack of success in the counterinsurgency fight. The Soviet army found its heavy equipment and conventional tactics of little use against irregular forces in challenging terrain. Continuing support from outside Afghanistan funded a largely Afghan insurgency that benefitted from open borders between Afghanistan and sanctuaries in Pakistan and Iran. "The Russians employed the most brutal forms of counterinsurgency: they aimed essentially to destroy the country and kill the inhabitants."<sup>24</sup> Carpet-bombing of population centers, attacks against agricultural infrastructure, roads and bridges destroyed, and intentional targeting of people and livestock by air and ground-delivered mines were commonplace.<sup>25</sup>

"The strategy of the Soviets and the Afghan government has been to spread terror in the countryside so that villagers will either be afraid to assist the resistance fighters who depend on them for food and shelter or will be forced to leave ... We were told of brutal acts of violence by Soviet and Afghan forces: civilians burned alive, dynamited, beheaded; bound men forced to lie down on the road to be crushed by Soviet tanks; grenades thrown into rooms where women and children have been told to wait."<sup>26</sup>

Russians summarily shot prisoner since they were viewed as illegal enemy combatants, not covered by the Geneva Conventions. Accounts of Russian anti-personnel mines, some designed to mimic plastic pens and "red-painted toy trucks," illustrate some of the most grievous, "enemy-centric" tactics represented in the conflict.<sup>27</sup> Aside from their obvious implications in their effects on children, journalists reported dramatic impact on livestock, and second-order deaths by infections.<sup>28</sup>

Several developments in conventional warfare aided the effectiveness of Soviet military operations. The Soviets established several new approaches, including: the “*Bronnegruppa*” concept; enveloping tactics, by use of air assault and airborne forces; improved ambush tactics; and innovative convoy security techniques. These tactics, along with constantly improving training by new generations of Afghanistan veterans, new weapon systems, and better junior officer and NCO leadership, generated significant improvements, too numerous to detail here.<sup>29</sup>

Additionally, specialty training for mountain and desert warfare became standard for prospective Afghanistan troops. As noted above, increased use of veterans to teach in these classes, while incorporating irregular warfare tactics, became essential. Officers in training began spending more time learning how to coordinate the additional support assigned to their units, particularly at the battalion and regimental levels. Prior to the introduction of the “reinforced battalion” concept, this kind of specialty, cross-training was nonexistent.

The important comment, noted by Cassidy below, identifies the Soviet overreliance upon conventional strategy, even after several years of fighting an irregular opponent.

“The Soviets brought the entire repertoire of an industrialized power’s military technology to bear against the *mujahidin* and the Afghan people. However, the Russians failed to recognize that technology is no substitute for strategy and will. In fact, maximizing technology by using force indiscriminately, *coupled with the absence of anything approximating a counterinsurgency campaign*, helped undermine the Soviets’ efforts in Afghanistan by alienating the population.” [Emphasis added]<sup>30</sup>

Logistical sustainment, both in terms of military operations and support to civil matters, played an important role in combating the insurgency. During the first three years of the fighting, *Medicines sans Frontiers* doctors observed more than six hundred Russian vehicles destroyed in the four provinces in which they worked.<sup>31</sup> Even more impressive was that from 1985, when U.S.-made, Stinger ground-to-air missiles began to be fielded, the *mujahidin* would claim to have destroyed four hundred aircraft. After the introduction of the Stingers, the Russians



virtually stopped flying in many areas, and lacking air cover that had tied down and discovered guerrilla forces, Russian ground forces were more vulnerable to ambush and tended to pull back to the cities. As a result, for most of the war, Soviet forces occupied only about a fifth of the country.<sup>32</sup>

Helicopters became critical to the offensive mobility of maneuver forces, but even more critically for its operational and tactical resupply capability.

“The Soviets in Afghanistan, like the Americans in Vietnam, discovered that helicopters were very useful for fighting *mujahidin* because of their mobility, armament, range and versatility... The helicopter did not enable the Soviets to adapt from a conventionally oriented force to a truly counterinsurgency-oriented force, but it did help them bring the fight to the *mujahidin* much more effectively.”<sup>33</sup>

Significant losses of helicopters to Stinger missiles started in 1986, curtailing both offensive operations and resupply. Losses of an aircraft per day were recorded and utility of heliborne insertion became limited.<sup>34</sup> Some sources argue that Stingers played a “decisive” role in the conflict, however, that assessment is problematic, since Moscow had already decided by 1986 that the war was unwinnable.<sup>35</sup>

The Soviet leadership demonstrated some weak attempts at civil-military coordination, indicating intent to conduct some form of counterinsurgency approach. Some political efforts, including attempted subversion of tribal and religious leaders, were a particularly important aspect of the political program.<sup>36</sup> David Kilcullen notes that “influential local tribal leaders and village chiefs – regardless of whether they formally support the government – are the key”.<sup>37</sup> In this case, the Soviet political leadership’s advice to isolate the radical elements within these categories is consistent with Galula’s admonition that the counterinsurgents “isolate the population as much as possible... from the guerillas”.<sup>38</sup>

The primary problem for the Soviet program was that lack of coordination between military and political efforts caused Soviet gains to be consistently reversed. As General Akhromeev

noted in a Politburo session in 1986, “there hasn’t been a military task that... hasn’t been completed.... our military successes have just not been supported by political ones”.<sup>39</sup> Political initiatives were likewise often left unsupported by military action. The limited results of the PDPA’s efforts were cynically described by critics as “‘socialism in one city,’ i.e., Kabul.”<sup>40</sup>

Contrary to popular belief, Soviets did attempt to perform political work, information campaigns and nonconventional military techniques as part of an overall counterinsurgency approach, through social, propaganda and economic programs. Social programs included incorporation of Soviet-friendly, Dari and Pashto textbooks into the Afghan school curricula, cross-cultural exchanges, summer camps in the U.S.S.R. for Afghan youth, and prizes to Afghans for art, literature, and poetry.<sup>41</sup>

The Soviets encountered difficulty in finding effective media to communicate their propaganda towards the Afghan people. Soviet leaders criticized the PDPA for this failure, noting: “A Soviet analysis of the situation in the spring of 1979 criticized Afghan PDPA members for being outdone by the ‘counter-revolutionaries’, whose work was ‘much more active and on a larger scale than the work conducted by party members’.”<sup>42</sup> Soviet advisors performed significant political work with newspapers, journals and, especially radio, due to the high illiteracy rate among the population. For example, in January 1980, the Soviets established “Radio Kabul” as one of their first social initiatives, and started rebroadcasting Soviet television from Tajik stations.<sup>43</sup>

As casualties mounted and the war continued, the Soviets even directed their information operations toward domestic and international audiences, making use of international institutions and venues to achieve counterinsurgency objectives. The propaganda was surprisingly clear-headed about Soviet policy goals. For example, it included a focus on the “good of the Afghan

people” and “corruption of capitalist interference.”<sup>44</sup> At the United Nations, Soviet diplomats made a concerted effort to keep Afghanistan off the daily agenda.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, Soviet leaders sought to limit press coverage of actual fighting within the Soviet Union, releasing only one “soldier’s story” per month.<sup>46</sup>

The inability of Soviet leadership to coordinate, integrate and de-conflict these complex social, political, and economic messages with widespread military activity on the ground exacerbated the disconnect between Soviet political and military goals. A clear illustration of this error can be seen in the Soviet action during Operation *Panjshir VII*.

The example of the Soviet offensive into the Panjshir Valley, during spring 1984, provides a compelling example of the overwhelming reliance of Soviet strategy upon purely military ends, and the ultimate futility of that approach. Over four years after the Soviet Union’s initial invasion into Afghanistan, six separate offensives into the strategically vital Panjshir Valley had failed to uproot the lethal insurgency led by Ahmed Shah Massoud. Emblematic of the changing character and expanding scale of the Soviet-Afghan War, Operation *Panjshir VII* marked the conflict’s largest air-ground operation. For the first time, the Soviets employed strategic carpet-bombing prior to ground combat, and achieved unprecedented tactical integration of both airmobile and airborne units. Furthermore, the introduction of specially trained *Spetsnaz* commando troops signaled growing Soviet awareness of the exceptional challenge posed by Massoud’s guerillas.

Between 1980 and 1985, the Soviet Army launched nine *Panjshir* operations into this remote, agrarian region, approximately 60 kilometers north of Kabul. The valley acquired its strategic importance from its position alongside the Salang Highway between Mazar-e-Sharif and Kabul. (See Map 1.) Specifically, control of the valley dictated command of the logistical

jugular of the Salang Tunnel, a passageway the Soviets blasted through the Hindu Kush Mountains, which provided the only overland supply route from the Soviet Union to Kabul.<sup>47</sup>

Nearly from the beginning of the war, Panjshiris contested the Soviets for control of the Salang Highway. From April 1980 to September 1982, Operations *Panjshir I-VI* sought to subdue the lower valley in a remarkably unimaginative fashion.<sup>48</sup> Morale suffered deeply amongst the DRA Army forces, who often defected to the insurgents on the spot, and with the conscripted Soviet troops, who had minimal formal training and none in counter-insurgency.<sup>49</sup>

On the other hand, the ranks of insurgent forces continued to grow, deriving strength from not only the Panjshir Valley, but also from neighboring provinces, whose residents rallied to fight under the banner of “The Lion of Panjshir,” Ahmed Shah Massoud.<sup>50</sup> This charismatic and confident, 30 year old ethnic Tadjik, drew comparisons with legendary revolutionaries, like Che Guevarra.<sup>51</sup> Respected particularly in northeast Afghanistan for his skillful defense of the Panjshir, and glamorized around the world, especially in the media as a resistance symbol, Massoud became something of a celebrity. Ahmed Shah Massoud’s forces would one day form the core of the “Northern Alliance” against the nascent Taliban. Seen as a moderate Muslim, Massoud earned the disdain of neighboring warlords and *mujahidin*, such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Interestingly, the Red Army identified this internal divide between *mujahidin* groups very early in the conflict, but was never able to capitalize fully on the enemy’s vulnerability.

Following Operation *Panjshir VI* in September 1982, Massoud’s strength was depleted; the Soviets had managed to weaken his guerilla force through the attrition of constant pressure. Despite successful raids and resilient spirits against the ineffective but nonstop Soviet incursions, Panjshir residents had been unable to harvest their fields for over two years.<sup>52</sup> Attacks from

neighboring warlords against Massoud caused endless annoyance. Massoud did what no other *mujahidin* leader would at any time during the war: he proposed a 12-month ceasefire with the Soviets in January 1983.<sup>53</sup> Vilified by rival leaders for bargaining with the communists, Massoud was nonetheless able to capitalize on this temporary agreement. By January 1984, he was once again ready to take up the *jihad* and his attacks on the Salang highway resumed.

The Red Army, eager to conserve its strength, used this yearlong ceasefire to focus elsewhere in the country, developing new equipment and experimenting with important tactical innovations. Soviet focus changed quickly to air power, with the number of Mi-24 "Hind" attack helicopters, the "main anti-guerilla weapons" of the war, increasing from 60 to 300.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, the Soviet Air Force flew Su-25 "Frogfoot" fighter-bombers on Afghan combat missions for the first time in March 1984.<sup>55</sup> Finally, and most importantly for the Panjshir campaign, the Red Army employed heliborne forces for "encirclement" of fleeing insurgents for the first time near Heart in 1983.

Operation *Panjshir VII* would be different from previous *Panjshir* offensives. The primary goal of the army was to capture or kill the celebrity insurgent, Massoud. The campaign's secondary purpose was to control the Panjshir Valley and remove its threat to the Salang Highway. After a week of heavy bombing, which would essentially de-populate the region, heavy ground forces would move into the lower valley.<sup>56</sup> Then, as an "anvil" to the heavy forces' "hammer," Soviet airborne and heliborne forces would conduct "encirclement" landings amid the side valleys of the Panjshir to trap, capture or kill fleeing insurgents. Finally, engineers would "sow the bomb-tilled soil with land mines," making the Panjshir uninhabitable for decades.<sup>57</sup> Soviet commanders' designed *Panjshir VII* to kill, capture or, at least, neutralize

Massoud, while occupying the lower Panjshir Valley with Soviet and DRA forces, who could build strong forts to defend against future banditry.<sup>58</sup>

On 19 April 1984, the Soviet bombers struck in the opening gambit of Operation *Panjshir VII*. (See Map 2.) Two hundred aircraft, Tu-16 "Badger" and Tu-22M "Blinder" bombers, and Su-24 "Fencer" attack aircraft, based in the Soviet Union conducted high altitude carpet-bombing of the entire valley. Massoud had advance warning from his spy network, so bombs fell largely upon empty fields.<sup>59</sup> Massoud managed to impress his handlers at the Pakistani Intelligence Service (ISI):

"Although we at ISI had insufficient time to organize a response to the warning, Massoud was able to blunt the expected blow. He evacuated hundreds of villagers from the mouth and lower part of the valley into the side valleys; he laid mines along the road up the valley and he sprung a highly successful ambush on the Salang Highway in which some 70 fuel tankers were destroyed...The next day, 20 April, he started to pull back his men, who numbered up to 5000, into the mountains and side valleys."<sup>60</sup>

After a full week of bombing, the Red Army ground forces, commanded by General Sergei Sokolov, Marshal of the Soviet Union, as the Commander of the 108<sup>th</sup> Motorized Rifle Division, entered the lower valley with approximately twenty thousand infantry, supported by another five thousand Afghan government soldiers.<sup>61</sup> The main ground elements included the 180th Motorized Rifle Regiment; two battalions from Separate Motorized Rifle Brigades; and a reinforced Guards Air Assault Division, elite ground units that included airborne, air-assault (heliborne) troops, and reconnaissance troops, called *razvedchiki*.

The types of troops employed in *Panjshir VII* speak to the importance the Red Army leadership placed in the campaign's success. Generally more experienced, disciplined, competent and well trained than their motorized counterparts, each of these types of units possessed an elite connotation. Airborne troops underwent the most careful selection process, and most extensive training.<sup>62</sup> The air-assault troops and *razvedchiki* each received less

training.<sup>63</sup> More importantly than their elite status, though, these troops enjoyed dramatically superior tables of equipment than armored forces. According to *Newsweek*, most Soviet sergeants and company officers possessed no radios or maps until 1987.<sup>64</sup> Large-scale employment of heliborne troops, working at great distance from the main body, required technological upgrades. Slowly, the Red Army bureaucracy had begun making meager improvements in personal equipment, more because of, rather than to allow, increased tactical decentralization. The Soviet leadership would increasingly accept these small-unit aerial employment techniques, beginning in Panjshir and more as the war progressed.

Once the armored columns entered the "de-populated" lower valley, heliborne and airborne insertions of company and platoon sized elements began atop the ridges above the valley and sub-valleys. Soviet employment and refinement of these maneuver elements would eventually mature into a "combined arms rifle battalion" (CARB) which allowed more integration of air and ground assets.<sup>65</sup> Essentially, troops from a motorized tank battalion could now either remain mounted, or dismount their armored fighting vehicles and become light infantry. In either case, they would henceforth enjoy their own organic supporting arms and engineering assets. Additionally, this construct provided significantly more independence to these formations, since previously, artillery and air support had required a laborious process of request from higher headquarters.

"The effort to create such flexible multipurpose forces capable of conducting air and ground operations and able to act independently through a more decentralized and flexible command and control is one of the most significant outcomes of Afghanistan."<sup>66</sup>

Operation *Panjshir VII* exemplified these far-reaching and revolutionary changes in Soviet warfighting. Increasing acceptance and utility of "aerial vertical envelopment" even started making its way into official Red Army doctrinal manuals.<sup>67</sup> A dramatic decrease in the number

of tanks and armored vehicles deployed to Afghanistan after 1984 reflected these changing roles. Moreover, doctrine for the motorized tank battalion, the base combat unit of Soviet Army, began to note that in addition to its use in the first echelon, doctrine also permitted the battalion's use in the second echelon, as a combined arms reserve. Furthermore, and even more radically, "a motorized rifle (tank) battalion may be used as a tactical airborne landing force."<sup>68</sup> The "laboratory" of the Panjshir Valley, and other similar battlefields across Afghanistan, had significantly shifted the agility and mobility of Soviet tactical forces, and expanded the horizons of senior Soviet leadership.<sup>69</sup>

At first, the vertical envelopments executed in *Panjshir VII* appeared to have achieved decisive results. *Spetsnaz* and airmobile forces caught dozens of fleeing insurgents in the restricted terrain, far more than in previous operations. Indeed, by late spring, Afghan President Karmal personally visited the valley, openly mocked Massoud, and declared the "Panjshir issue resolved."<sup>70</sup> However, Massoud would recover, as his intelligence network had given him just enough time to escape. Three days before the assault began, more than 40,000 Panjshiri civilians had fled the valley under Massoud's orders.<sup>71</sup>

Nevertheless, Massoud recognized that things had changed: "It has become a very hard war, far harder than before. [Soviet] commandos have learned a great deal about mountain guerilla warfare and are fighting much better than before."<sup>72</sup>

"Between 1980 and 1986 Soviet strategy in Afghanistan came to rely almost exclusively on airpower, staking everything on airpower's capabilities to deliver ordnance, interdict supplies and reserves, isolate the battlefield from the rear, destroy the agricultural basis for society and the 'fishbowl' from which the rebels drew their means of sustenance, and rapidly move troops from point to point."<sup>73</sup>

This statement applies in two important respects to the events of *Panjshir VII*. First, enhanced ability to move tactically across the complex terrain of the battlefield clearly benefitted



the Red Army, as highlighted by *Panjshir VII*'s short-term gains. Soviet ground forces, in conjunction with airborne, heliborne, air and special forces, would now repeat and improve upon these tactical adaptations across the country. Second, however, one of *Panjshir VII*'s long-term results, the failure to control the lower Panjshir Valley and, hence, the Salang Highway dramatically showed a diminished Soviet capacity for operational movement. The Red Army's inability to resupply or move troops safely by ground indicated a critical Soviet vulnerability. With ground traffic becoming increasingly restricted, and aviation more critical in each of the six analytical warfighting functions<sup>74</sup>, the introduction of "Stinger" surface-to-air missiles in 1985 (and especially in 1986) brought Soviet tactical forces to a relative standstill, causing an operational stalemate.

Operationally, by September, Soviet and Afghan forces had virtually abandoned all their gains in the Panjshir, except for a few newly constructed, fixed forts, which remained vulnerable to insurgent attack. Doctrinally, the Soviets had learned from past tactical mistakes and were now employing improved procedures to address the mountain-borne insurgency. For example, massed armored formations and columns gave way to light airborne and heliborne units. "The Soviets began to view the helicopter as a type of aerial successor to the tank or APC."<sup>75</sup> In Panjshir, only Massoud's advance warning of the assault and ability to evacuate his civilian population held off the dramatic surge in heliborne assaults, *Spetsnaz* attacks, and "an unprecedented high-altitude bombing campaign."<sup>76</sup>

In many ways, the Soviet-Afghan conflict had always been a war of logistics. After *Panjshir VII*, that war intensified. The Soviets, in losing control of the Panjshir Valley, yielded not only the Salang Tunnel and Highway, but exposed themselves to unfettered attacks at Bagram airbase, as well.<sup>77</sup> For Massoud, his ceasefire with the Soviets further angered some Afghans, such as

Hekmatyar, but also his own patron, Burhanuddin Rabbani, and Pakistan's ISI. After *Panjshir VII*, Massoud would take steps to reach out unilaterally in Peshawar, London and Washington for support. He would increase direct connections with CIA, and further increase his recruiting prowess in neighboring provinces, leveraging his "cult of personality" with the media.

Both sides endured casualties, though exact numbers from the operations are unclear. Tales of Massoud's success allowed him to replace his losses fast enough to be mission capable again by year's end. Soviet losses appear to have been more substantial than first thought; *Panjshir VII* was the largest operation of 1984 and overall combat deaths for the Soviets that year (2,060) doubled those of 1983 (1,057), and would never be matched in subsequent years.<sup>78</sup>

While Operation *Panjshir VII* successfully displayed many impressive organizational and doctrinal innovations within the Soviet armed forces, it simultaneously highlighted a failure in the Soviet leadership's operational art. Tactical accomplishments, however impressive, ultimately fail to achieve campaign goals when conducted in the context of ill-conceived strategy. Moreover, the complete absence of an alternative social, political or economic plan for the Panjshir Valley indicated a complete lack of counterinsurgency savvy. Even if Soviet forces had managed to capture or kill Massoud during *Panjshir VII*, the hydra-like character of the *mujahidin* resistance would have likely maintained the insurgency, perhaps temporarily degraded. The transition from road-bound assaults to airmobile and air assault tactics simply prolonged the inevitable in Afghanistan. The Soviet version of "transformation" or "Revolution in Military Affairs," however, achieved at considerable wartime cost, was the sole, redeeming quality of Operation *Panjshir VII* for the Red Army leadership.

The American experience in Afghanistan has drawn comparisons with that of the Soviets during their ten-year war, but unfortunately few lessons from that experience penetrated

American doctrine until several years into the conflict. The Soviets experienced two inherent disconnects which, together, doomed the enterprise to failure. First, their political strategy, which favored offensive exportation of Marxist revolution, ran counter to their military strategy and was completely inappropriate for the Afghan culture. Second, instead of an enemy-centric counterinsurgency approach, the 40<sup>th</sup> Army actually executed a conventional, attritionist style of warfighting, albeit leveraging state-of-the-art military forces, which developed significantly along lines of lighter, more elite forces over time. Their efforts to achieve political ends through overwhelmingly-military means, and in the absence of economic or social considerations, failed.<sup>79</sup> Proper counterinsurgency is a balance between military and political effects, a dynamic never fully appreciated or realized by Soviet leaders.

Perhaps discomfort over the Soviet penchant for ruthlessness fails to comport with American sensibilities over how the current insurgency should be fought, but to deny *any* lessons from the Soviet-Afghan War seems shortsighted. Artemy Kalinovsky noted recently in *Foreign Policy* that this reluctance is discouraging:

"It's a failure the United States apparently has no intention of repeating — to the extent that it doesn't even seem to study it. The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual does not mention the Soviet experience once. One analyst told me that when she suggested including the conflict as a way to inform current policy, Pentagon officials seemed to have little awareness about what Moscow had been trying to do there or for how long."<sup>80</sup>

Others have found the Soviet experience uninformative due to its purely conventional approach.

"For Western counter-insurgency experts, the Soviet learning process in the DRA does not contain any earthshaking new experience. The principal lessons: vital importance of small actions, need for decentralized and flexible control of support assets, increased responsibility for junior officers/NCOs, and expanded use of helicopters, had all been noted in Vietnam. For the Soviets there was a difference in that they learnt these lessons at first hand. Undoubtedly the war will have a lasting effect on their officer corps."<sup>81</sup>

The Red Army never abandoned its “big-war” approach, but the military delivered greater adaptability than its political and economic counterparts did. Air-ground tactics, helicopter and airborne encirclements, long-range artillery, and air assault offensives replaced tanks and tracks. Significant, even radical, changes began in doctrine, training and tactics. From this perspective, Cassidy’s view seems only partially correct, and overly-harsh toward the Red Army:

“Afghanistan confirmed what was already suspected about the general fighting capacity of the Soviet Army – it relied more on concentration (quantity) of forces and artillery preparation than on flexibility and maneuver. However, there is a more disturbing paradox – Soviet military experts knew what to do to win in Afghanistan but did not do it because of cultural reluctance, in other words, cultural inertia. There was no desire to change the doctrine, training, and organization of an army that was well adapted for a European war against its principal adversary.”<sup>82</sup>

Indeed, the Soviet incapacity to integrate political, economic and security elements with its military strategy lies truly at fault. As Kilcullen notes when discussing how to achieve his “Three Pillars of Counterinsurgency”:

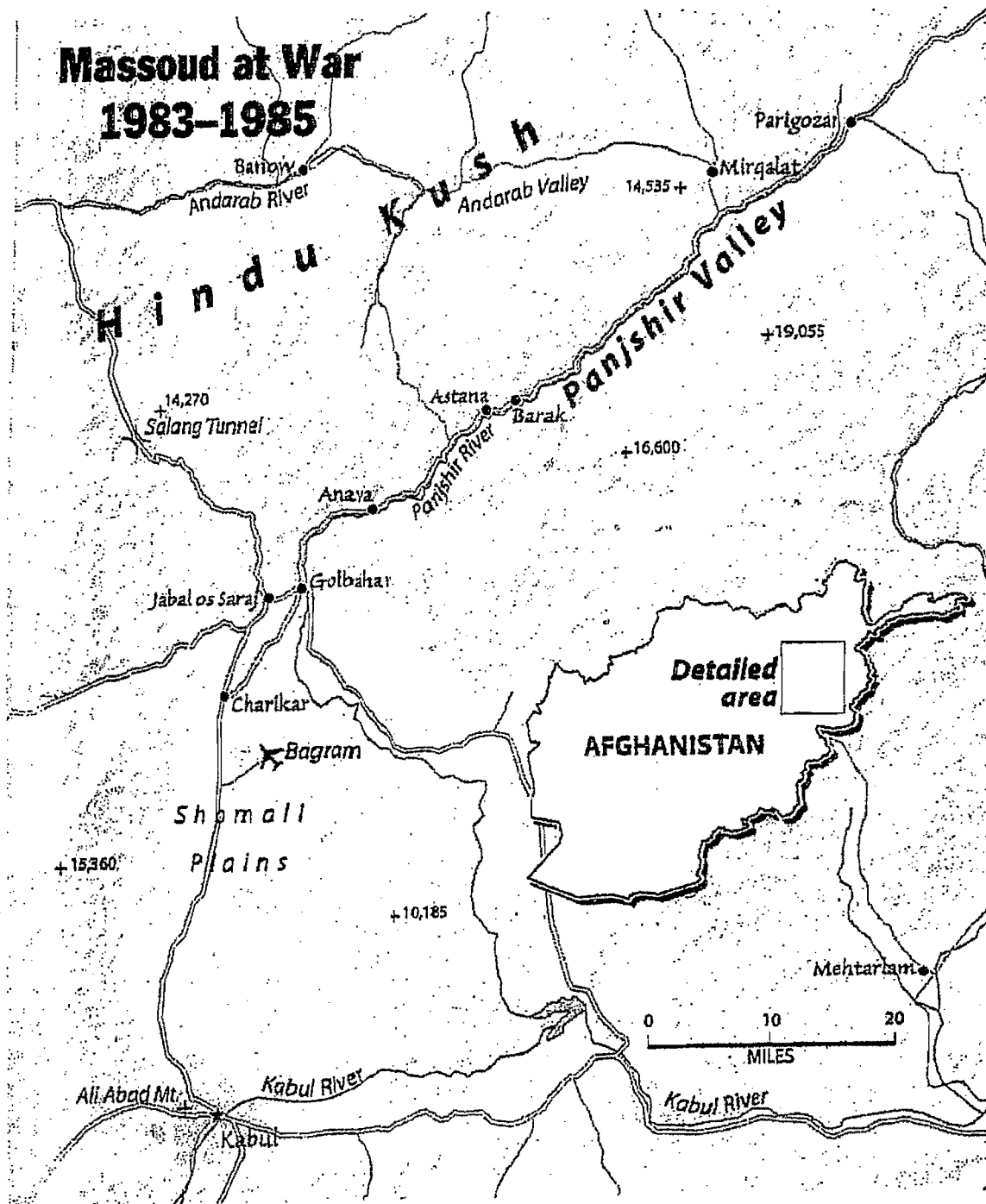
[Counterinsurgents] need to create “unity of effort” at best, and collaboration or deconfliction at least. This depends *less on a shared command and control hierarchy*, and more on a shared diagnosis of the problem, platforms for collaboration, information sharing and deconfliction. [Emphasis added]<sup>83</sup>

The Soviet Union, with its strong suit in governmental command and control, should have been able to forge a much more collaborative counterinsurgency approach, since central planners could (theoretically) influence their military, political and economic assistance directorates to achieve desired outcomes. America’s ability to mobilize its own interagency in pursuit of the “three pillars” may be even more challenging.

This “versatility and agility,” which Kilcullen cites, may be the most important traits for successful counterinsurgent forces, based on the relative experiences of the Soviets and Americans in Afghanistan. In December 2006, the American military released its revised

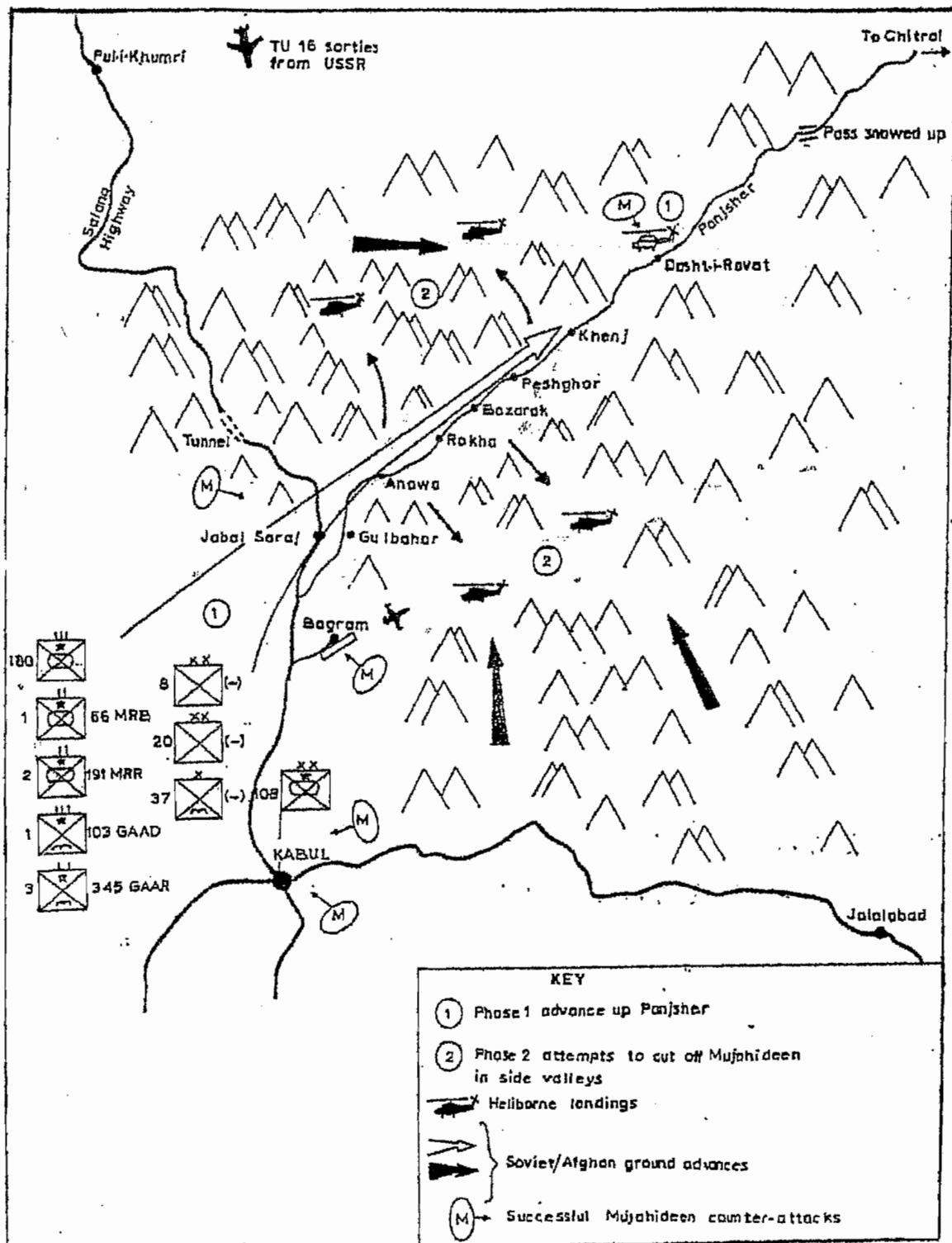
doctrine for counterinsurgency, after five years of fighting in Afghanistan and nearly four years in Iraq. Remarkably, the Soviet Union fought an insurgency in Afghanistan for nearly *ten* years, but then returned to a similar fight in Chechnya, five years later in 1994, having changed little and employing virtually the same failed, conventional doctrine.<sup>84</sup> Most importantly, though, the Soviet experience teaches that adaptation and development in military doctrine alone simply does not suffice in counterinsurgency. Versatility and agility across the whole of government, and in strategic thought, remain paramount.

Map 1 – Panjshir and Andarab Valleys, north of Kabul (Credit: Coll, 115)



Map 2 - Operation Panjshir VII (Credit: Yousaf & Adkin, 70)

THE PANJSHER 7 OFFENSIVE APRIL-MAY 1984



## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> C. E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996, 1896), 72.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence, T. E. "Twenty-seven Articles," *Arab Bulletin*, August 20, 1917.

<sup>4</sup> "Three Pillars of Counterinsurgency," Dr David J. Kilcullen, p. 4, Remarks delivered at the U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Conference, Washington D.C., 28 September 2006 , [http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/uscoin/3pillars\\_of\\_counterinsurgency.pdf](http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/uscoin/3pillars_of_counterinsurgency.pdf) (accessed on 4 January 2010).

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide. Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, January 13, 2009. [www.state.gov/t/pn/ppa/pmppt](http://www.state.gov/t/pn/ppa/pmppt).

<sup>6</sup> The term *Basmachi* comes from the Uzbek word *basmach*, meaning "bandit." The *Basmachi* resistance was never a unified front, but rather a rural-based guerilla movement that persisted throughout the 1920s in what are today the southern regions of Uzbekistan and western Tadjikistan. The movement relied upon no external support, except for temporary sanctuary in parts of Afghanistan and Iran. Alexandre Bennigsen, *The Soviet Union and Muslim Guerilla Wars, 1920-1981: Lessons for Afghanistan*. (Alexandria, VA: Defense Technical Information Center, August 1981), p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Condoleeza Rice, "Soviet Strategy." *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, March 1986), 656.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 657.

<sup>10</sup> William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 42. See also Rice, 655-658 for description of Soviet military evolution and strategic development.

<sup>11</sup> The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, ed. Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress, trans. Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2002), xix.

<sup>12</sup> Maley, 35.



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<sup>13</sup> Eqbal Ahmad, *The Selected Writings of Eqbal Ahmad*. (New Your, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006), 84.

<sup>14</sup> William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 14.

<sup>15</sup> Maley, 42.

<sup>16</sup> Mark Urban, *War in Afghanistan*. (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 64.

<sup>17</sup> Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama Bin Laden*. (New York, NY: Free Press, 2001), 69.

<sup>18</sup> William Polk, *Violent Politics: A History of Insurgency, Terrorism, and Guerrilla War, from the American Revolution to Iraq*. (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2007), 65.

<sup>19</sup> Ahmad, 84.

<sup>20</sup> Urban, 203.

<sup>21</sup> Robert M. Cassidy, *Counterinsurgency and the Global War on Terror: Military Culture and Irregular War*. (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), 58.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>24</sup> Polk, 200.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Pilan, Juliana Geran. "The Report that the U.N. Wants to Suppress." 12 January 1987. *The Heritage Foundation Online*. <http://www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/bg556.cfm>. (accessed 28 November 2009).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 201. Other sources downplay the role of excessive force or, even, war crimes by Soviet forces. For example, they assert that Soviet forces never employed chemical weapons during the conflict (with the exception of smoke and flamethrowers), but that mujahidin fighters did use them. (Russian General Staff, 255. Editors Grau and Gress label this claim "hard to accept." 262.) Even former Soviet officers, who exhibit an extremely apologetic tone for the "mistakes" of the war, almost completely overlook the harsh character of the tactics they employed. (See Sarin and Dvoretzky.)

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<sup>29</sup> See Stephen J. Blank, *Operational and Strategic Lessons of the War in Afghanistan, 1979-1990*. (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1991) and Alex Alexiev, *Inside the Soviet Army in Afghanistan*. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, May 1988) for detailed contemporaneous reviews of technical and tactical developments. These advances, which garnered significant attention in Western technical and military journals throughout the 1980s, identified significant changes in Soviet military doctrine, training and leadership development. While over-centralization continued to be the defining characteristic in the Red Army, several changes based on Afghanistan experiences made their way into official Red Army doctrine. Noting that the Army had few junior officers and NCOs with the proficiency and experience to influence effective action, Soviet military leaders began sending Afghanistan veterans to instruct at formal schools in order to disseminate their experiences. This approach improved over time at the battalions and regiments, especially as more weapons and equipment were fielded to subordinate units. See Russian General Staff, 35. (See also, Y. Bodansky, "Reinforced Battalion," *World Affairs* 145, no. 3 (1982-3): 283.

<sup>30</sup> Cassidy, 54.

<sup>31</sup> Polk, 201.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 202.

<sup>33</sup> Cassidy, 55.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Schweitzer, *Victory: The Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy That Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union*. (New York, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1996), 211-212.

<sup>36</sup> To strengthen the Afghan armed forces, the DRA Supreme Military Council on January 9, 1981, adopted a law requiring universal military service. Under the law all young men who reached the age of nineteen were eligible for immediate army service. Voluntary service in the National Afghan Army was still encouraged and continued to play its role. Then in August 1981, the Supreme Defense Council replaced the SMC. Allotted state and military power, the council was charged with "mobilizing the population to rebuff outside aggression and the internal counterrevolution." MajGen Oleg Sarin and Col Lev Dvoretzky, *The Afghan Syndrome: The Soviet Union's Vietnam*. (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1993), 76. Military and political training was added to the curricula of schools and universities. The Chief Political Department increased its focus upon the education of soldiers in party doctrine. (Ibid.) The time and resources spent here might have been more wisely employed in professionalization of the Army in order to enhance its legitimacy in the eyes of the population.

<sup>37</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc, 2009), 69.

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<sup>38</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. (London: Praeger Security International, 2006), 81.

<sup>39</sup> Svetlana Savranskaya, ed. *The September 11<sup>th</sup> Sourcebooks*, Volume II; Afghanistan: Lessons from the Last War, ("The Soviet Experience in Afghanistan: Russian Documents and Memoirs," October 9, 2001), 13.

<sup>40</sup> Urban, 210.

<sup>41</sup> *Government Publications Access*, "The Soviet Occupation," Illinois Institute of Technology. 14 January 2002, 29.

<sup>42</sup> Savranskaya, 13.

<sup>43</sup> The Cold War International History Project, Virtual Archive, "The KGB in Afghanistan, Vol. I," [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic\\_id=1409&fuseaction=va2.document&identifier=CDE50D78-CB01-8B7A-D4E5A68856CA3CD9&sort=Coverage&item=Iran](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=va2.document&identifier=CDE50D78-CB01-8B7A-D4E5A68856CA3CD9&sort=Coverage&item=Iran). (accessed November 11, 2009).

<sup>44</sup> *Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty*. "Veterans Remember Soviet Invasion Of Afghanistan 30 Years On," December 24, 2009, 38.

<sup>45</sup> Pilan.

<sup>46</sup> *Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty*.

<sup>47</sup> Mohammed Yousaf and Mark Adkin, *The Bear Trap: Afghanistan's Untold Story*. (London: Leo Cooper, 1992), 73.

<sup>48</sup> Each of these operations featured classic large-scale armored warfare, offering little indication that the Soviets expected to encounter irregular resistance. Twice each year, once in the spring and once in the fall, Soviet forces launched a conventional ground assault into the lower valley, usually some variation of the motorized rifle division preceded by enough heavy artillery preparation to cancel any degree of surprise. By the time ground forces would enter the valley, they would find only old men, women and children tending to the valley's farms. The combination of artillery preparation, together with a highly effective spy network within the DRA Army, allowed plenty of time for insurgents to escape to the hills. Bypassing the civilian inhabitants of the lower valley, columns of Soviet tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and armored personnel carriers would continue into the restricted terrain of the upper valley, rendering themselves hopelessly exposed to classic anti-armor ambush tactics. See Blank, 72. Also see, Joseph J. Collins, *The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: A Study in the Use of Force in Soviet Foreign Policy*. (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1986), 150-151.

<sup>49</sup> For further discussion, see Scott McMichael, "Soviet Counter-Insurgency Doctrine – An Ideological Blindspot," *Jane's Soviet Intelligence Review* (October 1990): 23-25; also see,

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McMichael, "Soviet Tactical Performance and Adaptation in Afghanistan," *Journal of Soviet Military Studies* 3, no. 1 (1990): 73-79.

<sup>50</sup> For the most complete descriptions of Massoud's wartime achievements, see Isby. For a complete view of Massoud's life, including his assassination on 9 September 2001, see Davies & Shariat. See also, Yousaf and Adkin for Pakistani (ISI) perspective on Massoud's relationships with media, civilians and rival warlords.

<sup>51</sup> Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 11, 2001*. (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2004), 467.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>53</sup> The 1983 ceasefire appears to have suited Massoud as much for the opportunity to pursue rivals, such as Hekmatyar in the neighboring Andarab Valley (see Map 1, upper left), as to placate the Panjshir's farmers. Throughout the war, Massoud never relied heavily upon the support of peasant farmers. Instead, he placed great emphasis upon resupply by ambush. "We do not regard an attack against a convoy successful, even if we destroy many trucks or tanks, unless we bring back supplies," Massoud told a visiting journalist in 1981. (Ibid, 116.)

<sup>54</sup> Blank, 73.

<sup>55</sup> Oliver Roy, *The Lessons of the Soviet/Afghan War*, Adelphi Paper 259. (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1991), 18.

<sup>56</sup> The Soviet proclivity for scorched earth tactics, reprisals and other terror tactics permeate the history of the Soviet-Afghan War. Many observers have noted that the objective of virtually every Soviet operation was, at least in part, to terrorize and intimidate local populations in order to remove the logistical support system of the insurgent. See Alexiev, *War in Afghanistan*, 2. Tactics such as high-altitude, indiscriminate carpet bombing, employment of "butterfly" anti-personnel mines from aircraft, use of explosive booby-traps designed to resemble children's toys, and deliberate destruction of villages were common, and well-documented; for a thorough discussion, see Alexiev, *Inside the Soviet Army in Afghanistan*: "Officially sanctioned reprisals and brutality against the civilian population in contravention to internationally accepted norms of warfare are common."

The intentional targeting of civilian population was widespread, but differed only in scale in the Panjshir Valley. The de-population of the valley, a key aspect of the Soviet plan, resulted in the exodus of up to thirty thousand civilians from the main valley into side valleys, many of whom never returned, and ultimately fled to Pakistan or Iran. Archaeologist and Afghanistan expert Louis Dupree famously coined the terms "rubbleization" and "migratory genocide" to describe Soviet tactics. See his articles, "Afghanistan in 1982" and "Afghanistan in 1983." Also see, Magnus, 209. Additionally, the literature claims confirmed reports of chemical weapons use, especially prior to 1983, but with allegations continuing into 1984, also common. The Russian General Staff vehemently denies these accusations even today. According to available literature, there is no suggestion of chemical weapons employment in any of the Panjshir offensives. See, U.S. Department of State, *Chemical Warfare in South Asia and Afghanistan*,

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23. See also, Eliza Van Hollen, *Afghanistan, three years of occupation*. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Office of Public Communication, Editorial Division. Special Report no. 106. Washington, DC, (1982), 5. See, The Russian General Staff, for Russian perspective.

<sup>57</sup> Coll, 122.

<sup>58</sup> Edward Giradet, *Afghanistan: The Soviets' War*. (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 76-79.

<sup>59</sup> Victor Markovski, "Afghanistan: The Use of Long-Range Aviation," *CombatAvia*. <http://combatavia.info/index9afg2.html>. (accessed November 15, 2009).

<sup>60</sup> Yousaf and Adkin, 71-72.

<sup>61</sup> Collins, 151; Polk, 201.

<sup>62</sup> Descriptions of the training of these forces include skydiving in low temperatures, cross-country skiing with minimal water, and even swimming distances underwater with the surface aflame. According to Alexander Alexiev, who conducted interviews with Afghan veterans, the training was not only challenging but "to some extent dangerous." Alexiev, *Inside the Soviet Army in Afghanistan*, 16.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 16-17.

<sup>64</sup> Russell Watson and John Barry, "Lessons of Afghanistan," *Newsweek*, February 20, 1989, 26.

<sup>65</sup> Blank, 76.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 74.

<sup>68</sup> General David A. Dragunskiy, et. al., *The Motorized Rifle (Tank) Battalion in Combat, Part I*, JPRS Translation, March 24, 1988, 54.

<sup>69</sup> Blank, 78; Blank cites Colonel F.D. Sverdlov's, *Forward Detachments in Combat*, JPRS Translation, September 17, 1987 for his "authoritative" perspective that, "in the Soviets' view, envelopment by air assaults combining airborne and heliborne strikes and landings is assuming a greater importance."

<sup>70</sup> Coll, 122.

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<sup>71</sup> Massoud's intelligence network was so successful, "he often had to persuade sympathizers within the Afghan Army not to defect because they were more valuable to him as informers than they were as fighters." Ibid, 117.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 122.

<sup>73</sup> Blank, 73.

<sup>74</sup> Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 5-1 with Change 1, 24 September 2001, identifies the six Marine Corps warfighting functions used by planners for analysis of military operations. They are "Command and Control; Maneuver; Fires; Intelligence; Logistics; and Force Protection."

<sup>75</sup> Mark Galeotti, "DSHB-Assault Landing Brigades From Afghanistan to 'Defensive Defence,'" *Jane's Soviet Intelligence Review*, (September 1990): 386-391.

<sup>76</sup> Coll, 123.

<sup>77</sup> Even while fighting for his life in Panjshir, Massoud's guerillas conducted counterattacks against the Salang Highway, Bagram and Kabul. (See Yousaf and Adkin, depicted on Map 2.)

<sup>78</sup> Blank, 19.

<sup>79</sup> Since the end of the Soviet-Afghan War, and especially after the fall of the Soviet Union, most former commanders and diplomats from the U.S.S.R. have adopted new views on counterinsurgency, imploring the U.S./NATO coalition to avoid military escalation. They defend their own actions as having been "responsible," but doomed to ultimate failure. "'Instead of bombs, it is urgently necessary to create a comprehensive road network!,' according to retired Gen. Viktor Yermakov, who led the Soviet Union's 40th Army in Afghanistan during the early 1980s, said that his staff officers came to realize that they simply weren't going to win the war by military means. "'But unfortunately it was too late,' Yermakov said, adding later that, 'We had to answer fire. When we were attacked, we attacked with all of our might.' His soldiers were in a battlefield, caught in a cycle of attack and counterattack with an enemy that usually slipped away by the time the artillery shells rained down. 'There was no military solution, but he had a war to fight.'" Tom Lasseter, "Russian Advice: More Troops Won't Help in Afghanistan." *McClatchy Newspapers*, March 9, 2009. <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/homepage/story/63581.html>. (accessed January 13, 2010).

<sup>80</sup> Artemy Kalinovsky, "Afghanistan is the New Afghanistan." *Foreign Policy*, (September 2009).

<sup>81</sup> Urban, 212.

<sup>82</sup> Cassidy, 50.

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<sup>83</sup> "Three Pillars of Counterinsurgency," Dr David J. Kilcullen, Remarks delivered at the U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Conference, Washington D.C., 28 September 2006, [http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/uscoin/3pillars\\_of\\_counterinsurgency.pdf](http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/uscoin/3pillars_of_counterinsurgency.pdf) (accessed on 4 January 2010).

<sup>84</sup> Cassidy, 47.

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